

Chapels (Catholic-Protestant) Sawtelle
Veterans Administration Center #12
Wilshire and Sawtelle Boulevards
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CAL-335

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
1000 Geary Street
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
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CHAPELS (CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT) SAWTELLE
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION CENTER # 12

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: Wilshire and Sawtelle Boulevards
OWNER: United States Veterans Administration
OCCUPANT: United States Veterans Administration
USE: Religious Services

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The two back-to-back Chapels on the Veterans Administration grounds at Sawtelle (called Building #20 by V.A.) was designed by J. Lee Burton, Los Angeles architect, and built in 1900. It is of the more exuberant shingle style, examples of which are rapidly passing away in cities. On the Veterans Administration grounds, the fanciful building gives an historical depth and a continuity from shingle and siding through Spanish styles into the thoughtful or mechanistic work of the present.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Congress appropriated \$150,000, in 1887, for what is now the Veterans Administration, and Senator Jones and his partner Colonel Baker and the Wolfskill interests deeded 640 acres to the Government for location of the home and Jones assisted in drafting legislation which established the institution.¹ The Wolfskill land lay east of Sepulveda Boulevard, and the Jones land was a portion of Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica. Beside the land, Jones also agreed to put up \$50,000 at the rate of \$10,000 per year for construction of the buildings. However, Jones' heirs preferred to settle the agreement by deeding to the Government

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an additional 113 acres, which was accepted and brought the total acreage to 713. Building began the following year with a two-story frame residence for the first surgeon - Dr. Hermann Hasse - which was completed in December, 1888. Veterans were invited to the new Home in 1888, and one thousand men arrived necessitating the use of temporary quarters. The first large domiciliaries were built in 1891 and 1893, but by 1900, when the Chapel was built, there were houses for the staff, including a Governor's House of 6683 square feet, a depot (now the newsstand), an engineering shop, with an area of 10,590 square feet, Ward Memorial Hall (later used as a theatre), and in 1899 a post office. Another domiciliary, a hospital and more quarters for the staff were built before 1905.

The Chapel, dedicated in March, 1900,³ has an area of 5289 square feet. The entrance facades of the two different Chapels have large gables which gives the building two entrance elevations. The Protestant Chapel, facing Wilshire Boulevard (south), has the more impressive entrance. It has an arched portico, about 5' above grade, and above the porch is a balustraded balcony at the left of which is a large square tower with belfry. A smaller tower at the right is surmounted by a pyramidal roof with a platform at the base of the pyramid that forms an over-hanging cornice which casts a strong shadow.

The entrance and vestibule to the Catholic Chapel is on the east side with a belfry of open arches supporting a steeple and surrounded by an open arched balcony. The apse is at the north end of the Chapel.

Wood siding and shingle, and a great deal of surface ornament produced by the scroll saw, are painted white. In an early photograph of the original wood buildings, however, all are of dark wood, perhaps weathered or stained brown, with white trim. The roofs were originally wood shingle, now composition shingle.

After a fire in 1955, alterations were made to the interior of the Protestant Chapel to strengthen the structure; the balcony was closed at that time and seating is now confined to the first-floor pews, which radiate from the front outward in semicircles.

The cost of construction for the Chapels was \$14,000.

REFERENCES

1. Fabulous Boulevard, by Ralph Hancock, Funk and Wagnalls, 1949, p. 197
2. Dear Old Boys in Blue, Elsbeth Andrea, Reynard Press, San Francisco, 1948.
3. Los Angeles Times, March 10, 1900.

General References:

Wilshire Boulevard, by Esther McCoy, Western Architect and Engineer, September 1961, pp. 36-37.

Interviews: Col. Robert Amedes Bringham, formerly at V.A.
Mr. Greenbert, Engineering Dept., at V.A.
Mr. Metz, Planning Dept., at V.A.
Mr. Joe Lessen, Publications Dept., at V.A.

Birth and Growth of Veterans Administration Center, by Leo R. Mallones, unpublished and undated, MS (From Mr. Lessen in Publications Dept., at V.A.)

Prepared by,

Esther McCoy
Esther McCoy

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions: The length is approximately 126' and the width varies from 40' to 60' with a total area under 5,000 square feet, due to an irregular plan of towers, porches and rear semi-circular apse and jogs in the building line.

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Foundations: Exterior perimeter foundation walls are 9" thick continuous brick, resting on 21" wide continuous stepped brick footings on grade, exposed on the exterior elevations. The interior system under the Catholic Chapel consists of typically 12" square brick piers on 24" square stepped brick footing pads on grade, spaced about 6' c.c. Longitudinally from pier to pier. The system under the Protestant Chapel consists of 12" square brick piers on 21" square stepped brick footing pads but arranged along four concentric arcs at about 10' c.c. with the arcs spaced about 8' c.c. The girders supported by the piers are curved along these arcs and built of vertical 1x10 pieces to form a continuous 6x10 member; these curved girders rise progressively to support a sloping auditorium floor. The 12" brick party wall dividing the Chapels rests on a 32" wide stepped continuous footing wall. The balconies in both Chapels are each supported by two 5" round cast iron columns (with plaster caps) resting on 18" square cast iron plates secured on 21" square brick piers supported on 36" square stepped brick footing pads; 13' apart in the Catholic and 21' apart in the Protestant Chapel. Miscellaneous interior bearing walls are supported by 2x6 underpinning at 16" c.c. on plates and by 9" continuous brick walls with 21" wide stepped brick footings on grade. Rehabilitation drawing of 1953 shows some reinforced concrete footings and walls to support a new shear wall at the south end of the Protestant Chapel.

Wall Construction: The main exterior walls are typically of 2x6 studding at 16" c.c. resting on a continuous 4x6 header plate on 2x6 underpinning of varying height secured to the brick foundation walls. The typical exterior finish is clapboard siding extending down to the top of the exposed brick foundation walls. Accent surfaces have "channel rustic" siding at the bases of some projecting square towers, contrasting with the decorative shingle treatment on selected wall surfaces.

Porches: South porch is recessed: 10' wide by 24' long, composed of three arches with the entrance through the center arch, and approximately 5' above grade. Small porches at the entry to the Catholic Chapel and to rear entrances of both Chapels; wood steps and T&G wood flooring.

Doorways and Doors: 6-paneled double doors of oak for entrances to both Chapels; other doors paneled of softwood.

Windows: The Protestant Chapel has windows of 9 different sizes on the front, many of them broken up into intersecting lancet-shapes for the entire window or the upper light of the double-hung windows. The facade of the east tower of the south elevation has two small semicircular windows above a lancet window which is ornamented with scroles along the hood mould and surmounted by an ornament at the apex. On the west and east elevations are 12' high round-headed windows divided into seven panels. The scale changes in the windows for the Catholic Chapel; on the whole, narrower and more Gothic in design. Five double-hung, narrow, lancet windows on the west and east walls have wood hood moulds surmounted by trefoil ornaments at the apex.

Roof: Consists of five large gables, three square towers of varying height with pyramidal roofs; the original roofing of wood shingles have been replaced with composition shingles and a rehabilitation drawing at Sawtelle, dated September 1953, indicates a 3/8" plywood diaphragm over existing rafters for seismic reinforcing over the Protestant Chapel and the replacement of some damaged rafters due to the fire of this period. The galvanized iron finials and crosses mounted on the apex of the gable roofs are shown on the original drawings. A Celtic cross ornaments the apex of the large tower and a Latin cross surmounts the tower of the Catholic Chapel.

Cornice: 2' overhangs and barge boards at the gable ends, supported by overscaled solid sawn brackets of wood: cornice at the top of the largest tower of south facade is a band of applied Romanesque arches with false water spouts at the corners surmounted by a band of applied Gothic arches. Cornice over the arched porch is supported by outside wood modillions and is surmounted by a balustrade of turned balusters. The scroll-saw was generously used for architectural ornamentation.

Miscellaneous: The 4" wood turned balusters over the main porch (south elevation); decorative fret work under the windows in wood; egg and dart moulds at archivolts; south elevation of wood; decorative galvanized iron gutters and selected cornices with minor brackets; galvanized iron blind arcades and gothic arched parapet at base of spires; 3x20 wood verge board at rakes of gables; 4" wood roll at main ridge; all shown on original drawings.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan: In the two back-to-back Chapels, the Catholic Chapel is less than half the length, but broadens out to force the plan out of the approximate rectangle. Approximate is used advisedly, for there are 14 jogs in the plan. The apse of the Catholic Chapel is at the north end; the sanctuary floor is raised. In the Protestant Chapel, the choir loft is behind the rostrum; the pews radiate from the front outward in semicircles. A balcony at the south end was enclosed when repairs were made after a fire in 1955.

Flooring: 1 x T&G hardwood (D.F.?) flooring over 2x8 joists at 16" c.c. - level in Catholic Chapel; sloping up from rostrum in Protestant Chapel, approximately 2'; balconies in both Chapels typical T&G flooring on 2x6 joists at 16" c.c.

Walls: Original wood lath and plaster - typical with wood paneled wainscots in both Chapels; rehabilitation drawing indicated Protestant Chapel south wall replaced with plywood shear wall and celotex panels; note plaster decorative archivolt at proscenium arches of both Chapels; a painted cornice band extends around the walls of the Catholic Chapel; decorative wood paneling at fronts of balconies are shown on original drawings.

Ceilings: Wood lath and plaster on 2x10 joists at 24" c.c. (bot. chord of trusses); Catholic Chapel height is 20' and the Protestant Chapel varies from 20' at rear (south) end of auditorium to 22' at the foot of the rostrum; intersection of walls and ceilings in both Chapels, on original drawings, are shown coved; however, the Protestant Chapel has been restored and the cove was removed.

Doorways and Doors: Frames and doors are softwood with applied wood stops and trim. Doors are generally horizontally paneled in varying designs of wood, some with upper vision lights (decorative pattern) and are both single swing and double acting. Main exits from auditoriums are 6'-0" wide x 8'-0" high, in pairs.

Trim: Plain wood casings and trim, hardwood and softwood.

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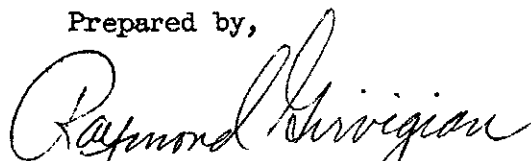
Hardware: Standard pin and butt hinges, also special double acting spring type for doors from main exits.

Submitted by,



William W. Woollett, AIA
AIA Preservation Committee

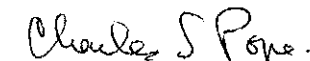
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September 1963

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National Park Service

DATE: November 20 1963

ADDENDUM TO:
NATIONAL HOME FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS,
PACIFIC BRANCH, CHAPEL
(Sawtelle Veterans' Administration Medical Center, Building 20)
Wilshire & Sawtelle Boulevards
Los Angeles
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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